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# On The Internet

## **Description**

Review of *On The Internet* / by Hubert L. Dreyfus, Routledge Publishing, 2001, ISBN 0415228077 (pbk.)

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# Hubert L. Dreyfus' *On The Internet*

Posted on **April 1, 2002** by **Editor**



## A Review

by **Drew Harrington** <[harrington@pacificu.edu](mailto:harrington@pacificu.edu)>

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**Routledge Publishing, 2001, ISBN 0415228077 (pbk.)**

Books reviewed here over the last months have looked at the Internet from a variety of viewpoints—sociological, technical, psychological, etc. Dreyfus' book analyses the Internet from a philosophical point of view. From Plato to Kierkegaard, Dreyfus considers the concept of “embodiment”—how embodiment defines the essence of being human, and how disembodiment in human interaction, via the Internet, may impact us. For the purposes of the book, Dreyfus defines embodiment as being our physical selves with the ability to move about, our physical location in the world, our physical and emotional interactions with others and our exposure in the “real” world to disappointment and death. The book asks if the body is becoming vestigial—if we live an increasingly large part of our lives in cyberspace will we become superhuman or nonhuman? Dreyfus takes the stance that our embodiment—physical, emotional and intuitive, is essential to our ability to make sense of the world, and that the actual shape and movement of our physical selves defines us.

He examines the present state, and future possibilities of distance, on-line education by defining seven levels of human knowledge on any given subject, from novice to practical wisdom. Because Dreyfus believes that higher level teaching and learning rely on the importance of “mattering” in the teacher-student relationship, and on the need to imitate or to “serve” as an apprentice, he suggests that on-line education will only be effective in accomplishing the first three levels of knowledge, moving students from novice to competence, but will not achieve higher knowledge, levels 4-7, which take students from the proficiency level to practical wisdom.

He also looks at human relationships, and sites studies to support his stance that deeply meaningful relationships are not forged on-line—“What is missing is people's actual embodied

presence to each other.” He speaks to the concept of leading anonymous, relatively risk free alternate lives on the Web. He concludes that meaning in our lives requires genuine commitment, and that real commitment means that we must own up to real risks—will anonymity and virtual commitment then lead to a life without meaning?

The book is completely accessible to the layman, and whether or not you agree with Dreyfus, the book and the concepts it examines are rich and thought provoking. Dreyfus sums it up in many ways by asking, “How much presence can telepresence deliver?”

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